

May 19th, 2022

Testimony for TPZ Special Meeting

Dear Ms. Valentino-Rodriguez and the TPZ,

I'm writing to add to my testimony submitted April 29th. Auer Farm recently sent out a letter saying that the zoning amendments will allow Auerfarm to pursue their mission of educating children. However, as the ZBA agreed during the June 2021 meeting, Auerfram was acting well beyond their mission of education in the types and frequency of events being held (including many loud DJ events with open bars).

The farm stated the zoning changes will allow Auerfarm to hold "a limited number of agricultural events," and I'd like to counter that they already hold a number of agricultural events, including several per month for children, and more seasonal ones such as Party in Plaid, Blueberry Jam, and the fall festival. I question the implication that they need a change in zoning law to hold these events.

In addition, they said the zoning changes will allow the farm to "have a farm store." They already do have a store that sells eggs, honey, and seedlings. In terms of the amendment allowing the farm to "expand the outdoor recreational activities that are compatible with the farm," their original use application allows for all these events that are compatible with the farm.

In terms of non-agricultural events, Auer Farm has not taken into consideration their principal use as an educational farm. They built a stage directly adjacent to my yard where they were about to hold over 50 performances with amplified sounds over the course of seven weeks. They have held DJ events with unlimited alcohol that have rattled the windows in my house and woken up my son.

The Executive Director Erica Fern cited COVID as a reason farms have closed, yet Auer Farm's summer camps and other children's activities have quickly sold out. Ms. Fern also received a PPP loan in the amount of \$26,445 last March, so I imagine was able to secure relief for the farm during the time that COVID may have affected their revenue.

Auer farm is packed daily with children from all over Hartford county, and is surrounded by neighbors and community – including me – who are more than willing to support them in their mission. What we are not willing to do is fundamentally change the character of the neighborhood by hosting events that are incompatible with their mission and their zone.

Sincerely,

Jennie Kelly

Written Testimony on TPZ for May/26/2022 Agenda Item on Petition by Aaron J. Romano for a proposed Zoning Regulation text amendment to allow for the expansion of farm activities to include agritourism.

Submitted by Garrett Phelan
37 High Hill Road
Bloomfield CT 06002

A. Deny petition for Zoning Regulation-Text Amendment

1. Text-Amendment

-The text-amendment is too broad and vague. It was cobbled together by using selected regulations from Simsbury and Granby with additions by petitioner. It leaves it up to the farm to have "right intentions." Opening up farms to overnight camping opens a huge can of worms of how that would work. It would mean a farm was open 24/7!

-According to TPZ member on May 19th meeting text-amendments are not used for such expansive and complex issue. Text amendments are used for smaller issues per TPZ member.

-Only petitioner from one small farm (Lion's Tale Roar) petitioned the TPZ and offered testimony at the first meeting. The petitioner did not seek any input from other stakeholders. Based on that there is little call, even by farms, to change regulations now in place.

It is difficult to put under the same umbrella of regulations a 501c3 120 acre farm that is educational in purpose with that of a 5-10 acre LLC farm and Retreat Center.

2. Use "full regulatory process"

I'm not sure I understand this process fully, but it is my understanding that the petition is now on an "expedited regulatory process." If a text-amendment for this proposal is appropriate, it would seem to need a slower more detailed look at all the components and the possible unintended consequences. It would also give time for various stakeholders, especially property owners and residents since any change in present regulations could have an impact on residents' quality of life and property values.

3. POCD Vision- and "Greenway" that would include Auer Farm State Park, Auerfarm 4-H, Reservoir #6, Appalachian Trail, Talcott Mountain and Great Drain

By denying this petition it would give the chance for the town to consider creating a protected and quiet reserve for important wildlife habitat and a working educational farm. As mentioned in my 5/19/22 Testimony what a special and wonderful collaboration this would be and it would make Bloomfield very special!

This will give farms time to create more activities that are farm related and could produce some revenue.

4. Present regulations are workable and easy to understand and works for residents and farms. 6 Fundraising Events that can have outdoor amplified music that conforms to present noise ordinance and ends no later than 8pm. Auerfarm also has stipulations in the Quit Claim Deed when they bought the property from the Auerbachs that it is a 501c3 educational entity and agreed to abide by the Quit Claim Deed when they bought the property. The Auerbach family were visionary in what they wanted for the farm.

With some creative thinking there are many ways to create classes, events, workshops, etc that conform with farm related events as now determined in the TPZ regulations in the Cease and Desist Order on AuerFarm. There are 100 possibilities, some of which I have suggested to Auerfarm such as farm/nature art classes, nature/farm photography class/workshop, birdwatching, knitting using wool from farm animals, writing/poetry workshops on nature writing/farm topics. I even volunteered to teach poetry classes. Additional classes and workshops classes like yoga, meditation, etc might be acceptable if held inside.

Other Considerations

1. Agritourism vs Entertainment Venue

What's the line between Agritourism Farm and an Entertainment venue? I propose a Agritourism Farm keep events as farm related, with limited 4-6 outdoor **fundraising events** that have sound that is amplified. Fully enclosed building/rooms (not tents) could be used for other events.

Although I'm not in favor of farms renting out facilities, if they do so, the event itself should be in an enclosed building/room. That would not preclude the use of the farm to tour, hike, walk during the events, but the event itself and any "entertainment" should be inside.

2. Westmoor Park vs Simsbury and Granby Farms

The petitioner references using Simsbury and Granby Regulations. to create the text-amendment, I also suggest the TPZ look at Westmoor Park especiall in regard to Auerfarm.

<https://www.westhartfordct.gov/town-departments/leisure-services/westmoor-park>

Westmoor Park is a self-funded environmental education center operated by the Leisure Services Department of the Town of West Hartford, encompassing 162 acres. I'm not sure what they mean by "self-funded."

Similar in size to Auerfarm, and located in a residential area. Rentals are limited to indoor facility. I do think they have a few outdoor events but I did not see any on their site.

<https://www.westhartfordct.gov/town-departments/leisure-services/westmoor-park/facility-rentals>

Although there are similarities, I also realize there are major differences. Westmoor Park is a park with a 4-H educational element and run by the town. Auerfarm is a 4-H private, educational fully operational farm. At the same time they are both educational farms and connected in various degrees to 4-H.

